

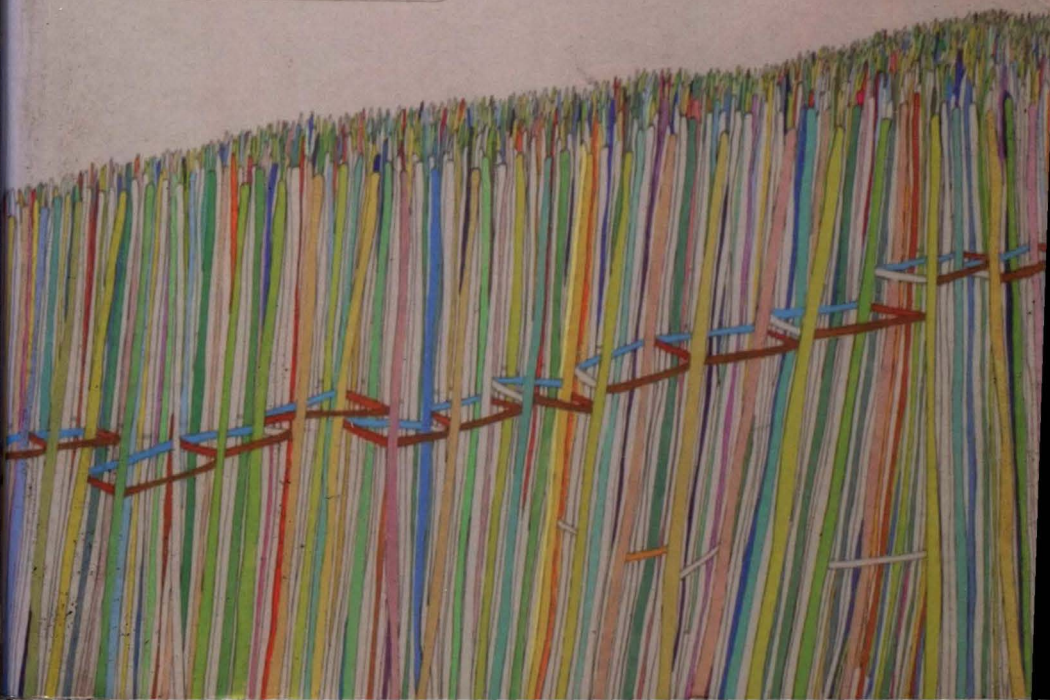
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THE RAVICKIANS A NOVEL RENEE GLADMAN



REVIEWS OF RENEE GLADMAN'S
EVENT FACTORY

"*Event Factory* is a profound study of the architecture of being, knowledge, memory, and desire."

—John Madera, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*

"[L]ike a static sculpture that also seems constantly in motion or a dance momentarily evoking an architectural shape, Renee Gladman's excellently strange new work *Event Factory* is a deliberate and skillfully sustained act of contradiction."

—Eugene Lim

"*Event Factory* calls attention to the desperateness of being human—how often I fumble and how simultaneously anxious and terrified I am for and of intimacies not only through the body, but also through language."

—Danielle Vogel, *Denver Quarterly*

"There are passages in *Event Factory* which are furiously beautiful. The evening air is 'tender'; the light is 'yellow'; the morning is a 'greener yellow at the start of the day but every moment growing golden.' Everything the narrator tries to do ends in failure, but experience somehow happens anyway. And while it's probably important for the critic to preserve the oddness of Gladman's project, it must be said that *Event Factory*, for all its challenging images and language, is cheeky and hilarious. It makes great, unpredictable company." —Adam Novy, *Dossier*

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THE RAVICKIANS

RENEE GLADMAN

THE GREAT RAVICKIAN NOVELIST

To say you have been born in Ravicka in any other language than Ravic is to say you have been hungry. That is why this story must not be translated. If, for example, you are reading these lines in French or German, Basharac or English, these are not the lines you are reading. Rather, these are not the lines I wrote. Of course, I do not wish to undermine the dexterity of my translators—I have heard they are competent—it is that the things I am trying to say are internal. The interior is twofold: Ravicka is not well, and its recovery has everything to do with architecture.

Our governor Ludoc Vlati sings the city's praises; we are against him. While I will also adore our city, we are not against me. The difference is the buildings between us. That I can still say "buildings" shows that we have not lost all yet.

My city is also my country, not a common occurrence, yet neither is seceding from a stronghold nation without violence. We have since had violence. Still, in drawing this portrait, it is important to stress that we had not violence then.

Three years after Ravicka gained its independence from Bashir, I became an infant in a lap and an Amini. I grew up in the center of the city—among trains, street vendors, cafes, cigarette smoke, and though at the time I never thought, “This is a city life I am living,” on some level I knew it was important to take note of where I was. I would like to transcribe those impressions here; yet, at this moment, they resist me. Soon, I think to myself. In the way it is possible to find the place you are looking for by simply moving about outside, so too when in your mind and writing.

It seemed that every square of cement of my childhood had persons in it. When you are small, you cannot ignore

the heat from large bodies moving around you; even those that are standing still emanate it in some way. “I am not a body,” I often said as a child, because I believed mine was not big enough. There is the proximity of the adult human body and then there is the closeness of buildings. The buildings, I have always loved.

The papers today report our population at 245,873, the same for the last twelve days. This news is indicative of so many things; we are proud to say that no one has fled in that many days, no one has died (or been found to have died); we are less proud to say that, in this time, we have had no immigrants. The number 245,873 is only an eighth of Ravicka's past registry. We had so many people.

The papers also announced that Zàoter Limici is performing at Vonzy Hall tonight. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to see him. Perhaps we will walk the city streets as we did the last time we met, although relations between person and place were less tenuous then. One did not walk among buildings wondering how long he or she might be able to do such a thing. At the time of that previous walk, Z. and I had set out for cit Sahaly,

one of the oldest districts in Ravicka. Our discussion was unremarkable. I believe we were reviewing current practices of thought among our colleagues. Before this anxious reality we now face became fixed, I admit many of us were involved in obscure procedures, such as removing vowel priority from our work. If this is a translation, you will have read "vowel priority" and will not know what I mean. In Ravic, words that are heavy in the "rounded sounds" (i.e., vowels) tend to signify abstract states of living. These states are expected of you if you are a writer. However, some of us wished to subvert that designation and devote ourselves to the concrete; we used the grid of Ravicka proper as our surface.

But that night with Zàoter—it had to have been over a year ago—tradition was upheld. We walked *djor bleje*, an elaborate and collective undertaking that ensues at the conclusion of a social event. This walk, the route of which is determined by a set of rules that shift according to the hour, to whether an older or younger person

is leading, to the level of precipitation in the air, is made toward a new geography. How though, when each of us has been so isolated by this crisis, can *djor bleje* happen tonight? Could one even bear it? Could a group?

I send a message to Zàoter by courier informing him that I shall make an appearance tonight. This will be the first time in many days that I have left the house. I think it best to save him from that particular worry of "is she or is she not coming," though he must know I would never miss this reading. And, Ana Patova, it would take inhuman strength not to alert her that I am to come.

Ana Patova, my love.

Thirty years ago Ana Patova and I were young writers living in the Mohaly district, a quiet neighborhood adjacent to the Bleetsgat, the then-reputed "place to be." The Mohaly district, if not as popular as the Bleetsgat, was enthralling to its residents, due to the strangeness of its light. But, my readers will argue, wherever I am it seems always "the light" that I claim worth noting.

Perhaps this is so, but it must have been the light of Mohaly that made me this way. Even Ana Patova in her classic work *I Thought of Architecture* could not resist a chapter on it.

Her entrance into my life came at a crossing, that of the great bridge connecting cit Mohaly to cit Sahaly. I no longer remember from which direction each of us was walking; it is equally possible to have been either—one was always moving back and forth between these enclaves. You bought your typing paper in cit Sahaly and your coffee in cit Mohaly. The scholars preferred Drzes' bookshop in Mohaly, but met to discuss their reading in Sahaly. I was writing my first novel at the time and would have wanted to occupy both places simultaneously. So, it is more likely that I was not actually crossing the bridge, but standing directly in its center. In any case, it was not the beauty of the person approaching me that caught my attention; rather it was the title of the book in her hand, or to be precise, its typography.

It seemed to go with whatever I had been thinking, because as she passed me, some instinct took over the body: before I could stop myself I had reached out and grabbed the book from her hand.

I have been sitting here trying to recall, with no luck, who spoke to whom first. I also find nothing that explains how we made our way to the railing of the bridge, nor what we did for most of that hour we spent together. I had given her back the book. That is clear. I see her holding it. But, in that memory, there is also the sense that something had opened between us. Someone had said the right thing and propelled us into this conversation. Words come back to me now—"the elongated later," "your rare insides"—though these words had to have occurred in a different arrangement to have made sense. Approaching also is the reflexive body, the torso sweeping down and the slender arm reaching for the other's opposite side.

For a long time after this meeting, Ana Patova and I referred to our friendship as "The Bridge." We would say, "Were it not for The Bridge," and so on.

If at any time the place where you are looking appears to be a monument of your past, full of people you have admired all your life, then you are in Lefits, that favorite club of yours.

All morning I have remembered Lefits.

All morning I have been drinking coffee, every time brewing a single cup and adding some drops of cream. It appears I am waiting for something. From the United States, there is a new book from the Poet of Architecture, translated into Ravic by Sirin Cucek, I have unwrapped it and burrowed in, all the while hoping that what I am waiting for will not destroy me.

The courier has returned with a message. Zàoter expects me and so do "the others."

Ravicka is not at all silent as they say it is. When I am in the city I hear everything. When on Bodi I can hear voices from Shumgater, two blocks away. When those voices cease I hear the Balša wind. Very late at night, a single car speeds through the streets. I hear its engines shifting gears. I imagine this nightlife of the driver, living through insomnia no doubt. And I find that the questions I send out to her about why she is here come whirling back at me. Who are you with? Who are you ever with? Repeatedly. So Ravicka is not at all silent.

I close the book I am reading at the illuminated bench when my bus approaches. I am going on a late-night ride and I am not the only one. If this were another time, we passengers could form a club. But club life does not fit with the solitary confinement of this part of our century. We are surrounded and we are alone. This state goes on and on until something breaks, until

there is no more lonely left, until we are so full and extended with emptiness that there is no place to go with it. And then out of the dark, someone shows up and gets through. Every so often, it will be a group.

The bus is so familiar it is a person to me, and these streets we travel our conversations. No, Ravicka is no more silent than Berlin is right now, than Times Square in America. It is 4 A.M., even Tokyo would be asleep. But even if you are sleeping, you are making noise. I hear you grinding your teeth, hear you mumbling "Oh no, oh no." I hear you swallow.

The others will always be important, no matter what happens. No matter how these pieces of construction conform to the quality of space surrounding them, the others will be there. Even if I never call their names. Mind you, I would never write this story without making it a story of others, though there is mostly static when I reach for them.

I re-read Zàoter's message. "You are always welcome," he says. How gallant he is. The memory of our last walk must be fresh in his mind as well. I consider writing a more in-depth response, maybe to fill him in on what has happened to me since we last met—"Dear Zàoter, I have been walking," my letter would say. "I have been walking and walking." However, I decide it would be more prudent to focus on my preparations for tonight, which includes reacquainting myself with Zàoter's most recent book. Of course, the new work will be quite different—his "voice" is always changing—but I would like to enter it through the old work. So, I have pulled out *Szmeschingli* and will read it now, since to arrive at Vonzy properly, I will have to set out several hours in advance. It is not possible for me just to simply go to Vonzy Hall. I am not sure if I have ever *just gone* anywhere. In Ravicka, you walk out into the city and want immediately to get swept up into an adventure, and it is only after this adventure, which might take the better part of the day, that you wish to arrive at your destination.

As a child, in this city, there was a sense that when you were outside—as long as you were outside—you were not stuck as a person. A child could look around and, if unhappy with the character she was presenting, she could shed it for something better. She could absorb another without guilt and without the obligation to submit a report. She would have been too young at the time to be known by her parents, thus, free.

I am going to tell you that without exception, when I needed to be something other than myself, I became trains.

Ravicka's trains move through incredible tunnels at meandering speeds, so that you can set your breathing to them. The sound of wheels pulling through track can be your sound, sound of your experiences.

But it takes a lot of money and personnel to keep a train system running. How is it possible that all our trains are working, except for three on the suburban line? How does transportation fail, and which goes first, food or transportation? It appears we are doing well enough to pay people to run these cars, to keep our platforms clean. The trains are a source of encouragement. Many things are. Everything is. What isn't? Much isn't.

Against decay, a new building goes up, intended for public service, Vlati says.

As part of his "rejuvenation" plan, he is setting aside the top floor for penthouses. "To congregate living," the developer advertises. To make palaces of government homes, I think.

Against decay, I've written *Secayásé Minje* across the developer's sign, though a voice reprimands.

It is most-night when I call out to you.

You have been lost in my city for as long as you can remember. Could this building ever serve you?

This morning, I sent out two messages: one to Zàoter Limici and another, more covert one to Ana Patova. I had not expected her reply, yet the courier is here. I unfold the letter he hands me and see that she has written in English. I cannot decipher it. It's none of the usual words. It doesn't say "house" or "lane" or "water."

I am thinking about this translation you are reading. If you are reading it in English or know English better than I do, I am thinking how simple these words of hers would seem to you. They probably say the most basic thing about life. Were I to include her note here I imagine you reading it thinking it is composed of the simplest words of that language, even a newcomer should be able to grasp them. But, in my defense, no matter how clear these words are to you, they were not written for my comprehension. Ana Patova's intentions

have never quite reached me. Her words flow in a linear, progressive fashion; however, always, it seems, toward erasure. The closer I get to the end of a sentence, the less certain I am of its beginning. While this quality is potentially interesting for creative or theoretic work, it is obstructive to everyday communication. We have thirty years of this.

I hear the voices of the courier and my neighbor Bulcsú from my third-floor window. I run down to the street, hoping to catch the courier before he jumps on his bicycle. "Lóje!" I call after him. "Wait. Can you take a job for me?" I assure him he will be paid. "Please," I instruct, "rush this message back to the sender." And I hand him the characteristically small envelope. I have chosen to write her back in English, despite not having exactly deciphered the content of her note. I use the three words I mentioned earlier and these five additional words: "Hello," "Darling," and "in my boat," then add "of a bed" in our Mother tongue.

With encouragement the courier goes off.

Bulcsú is smiling broadly in the doorway of his building, having sensed a mystery.

"Gurantai," he bellows.

"A 'rantai, my cousin," I answer reluctantly. Then return to my apartment, my books.

There is nothing inherently complicated about attending an intellectual event. In our country, readings are treated the same as plays: the pressure is placed appropriately on the presenter. However, it has been some time since I have been among people. In the way of stillness, in a reception hall. So, it is not exactly with ease that I will enter.

I want to raze one city block of my mind, to open up the entire avenue for what is to come. For this purpose, I will relinquish the area I have dedicated to the study of maths, and, rather than find some cranny for the displaced information, I will let it go. Yes, for about two hours—after this procedure but before I enter the performance hall—I will have an entirely empty corridor in my mind. Empty. Beautifully empty. Of course, the danger is with the inevitable desire for more emptiness,

which makes one attack other parts of one's mind. The compulsion is not unlike what follows the moment where you are conscious of the entire surface of your skin and there is one small patch over which someone has run her tongue and, above that spot, blown a bit of air. The cool of it. How you want to extend the feeling, so turn to other neighborhoods within you or beg the lover to move on with her tongue. How impossible it is, though, to make any more feeling than you already have. You run the risk of going utterly numb.

Preparing for tonight is delicate and interesting and nearly beyond me. Visits from the courier act as a buffer. I am in a buffer zone and eating my lunch, thinking about the Pouissart building. I am operating with the assumption that when the courier returns with Ana Patova's response, she will have reverted to Ravic. We have thirty years of this.

Rarely does the shape of a city change once it is full of structures: you cannot rearrange the grid. How extraordinary it is that you must know what you want right away. That is, if you are building a functionalist city. Unfortunately, it seems that that is always what you are building, as if anywhere there is government there must also be rows upon rows of squares.

I have seen, over many years, the surface of squares change, but hardly ever the squares themselves. That is why I have been thinking of the Pouissart.

This building, constructed years before "the despair" overtook Ravicka, is intact yet remains empty. Its name etched onto the façade, in a corner as one would find on a painting, says nearly everything. I have studied it etymologically and though, in itself, it has no ancient

meaning, its parts do when used in other contexts. Stretching authority, I know, but one has to begin somewhere. You can say, "*Ja hini pouj*" (I am calm) and people will feel the weight of that, or, "*Hij ciut bendum zissart ben tali*" (There are fissures in the city) and teams will appear in force. I once took my studies to the building eighteen days in a row.

What I wanted to discover is why on one day the roof of the Pouissart appeared to be made of one kind of material and on the next day of another kind, alternating between glass, steel, and, every so often, something tar-based. I was able to see the roof because of the taller, glass-encased corporate headquarters of our energy provider. Was the roof's fluctuating state the reason the Pouissart remained vacant?

At first, that seemed to be the case. Then I noticed that other buildings—for instance, the very roof of the energy provider on which I stood to study the Pouissart—

were undergoing similar transformations. I do not think that the day I first noticed the change was the day it first had happened. There is usually a lot more drama around these occasions: everything stops or everything glows or everything crashes into everything else. It was odd to think that these first-times were happening all over the city and were impacting me in some huge way but that I had never been witness to them. Yet it did not seem that these roofs changing as they were caused any interruption in how the buildings themselves were occupied. In fact, the buildings began to seem more ordinary in being in such flux, except for the Pouissart, which had something of its own to work out.

It might startle you to know that, despite its ghostly interior, the Pouissart provides outdoor seating for the public in the form of stone benches and wing-side staircases; it might also surprise you to know that seventeen flags billow above its main entrance in a great state of pride, though the referents for the flags have

yet to be identified. One thing that is still possible in Ravicka is the ability to make multiples of a thing that does not already exist. You can design a flag and name a country, then design another flag and name another country, years before you have to bring that country into existence. I am with the Pouissart in its forward thinking. It has twelve floors. Can you break open a place that has closed you out, for the simple reason that you love it? Twelve floors of locked-up possible—

"What the hell does this mean?" I call out to no one in particular. I am alone in my kitchen. The courier has left saying he is "off" for the remainder of the day, saying this in English instead of the customary "*lushung doc*," saying it so bluntly, I believe, to discourage me from sending him on a return mission.

Meeting a person on a bridge and standing there with her, not progressing to either end, but staying put or at most drifting conscientiously over to the side, imprints upon you the sense that you are hovering with the person. I harbor little expectation that Ana Patova and I will ever complete our conversations. However, our contributions are usually more productive than this one. Why am I trudging through this Arabic dictionary looking for a key to decipher her message? It does not take long to realize this is not Arabic I'm reading. It

is a Semitic script, I have learned, but from a different region. After another hour of digging, I discover the origin of the writing of this note: Ana Patova has written me from the Amharic. I am exhausted.

Zàoter's performance begins in a few hours and my energy has begun to push back over itself. Where before the prospect of re-immersion had made me almost giddy, now I feel a stale-bread sensation setting in. Nevertheless I will go, even if I have to drag myself curbside.

It is dramatic and wonderful and isolating to present your work before an audience. You have got to hide your sweat and pretend your back fat does not bother you. Whatever shirt yōu are wearing, it must fit comfortably over your breasts yet let a little cleavage show. Dramatic, because you must connect with the piece you are reading, even if at present you do not. So you project your voice to cover the weakness. Wonderful, because you remember to breathe in from your navel region, but isolating when you forget to blow out, when you are breathing twice as hard as you would were you using normal breaths. Dramatic, remembering your nose and your breasts. Isolating, looking out for the eyes and smile that are not there. Wonderful to translate the eyes you do get into the eyes you want.

Zàoter is a man, and because I am not, I do not know if this matches his experience. I know in the obvious case

of breasts it does not. In public, men's sexual organs are always behind the podium or beneath the table, except when it comes to sports. It does not matter, though. I am not driving a point particularly.

But to recite! To use sculpted language to say, "this is me," in a way that relies solely on the past, on what has already befallen you, protected somehow from the present—what else would one want? Well, this describes my problems with speech, not Zàoter's.

The old bungalows lining my street fascinate me now as much as they did decades ago when they first appeared. They were promoted as "innovations against slum living," though none of us could find any "slums" at the time. We were collectives, living in four- or five-story apartment buildings, and this felt fine. These clusters allowed us to share our opinions with the government: we could shout as a group and not be terribly afraid of being tracked down as individuals. But something began to trouble us about these buildings in which we were living. It was as if the propaganda actually altered their condition: suddenly the walls were crumbling, there were too many rodents, too much noise at night. We "dropped like flies" as my American friend, Edward, would say. One after the other coveting these strange, isolated huts.

Today in Ravicka we do not want as much as we wait. Opening doors, stepping out into the street we must wait. Counting the bungalows to see if they are all there, we are waiting. Put the toast in the oven and wait. *Matlatli Doc*—I am waiting for you. Any you to differentiate for me what is new and what is dying. I cannot tell on my own. These bungalows, are they falling to death in the way the Westside highway has? Do we see them as they are or as they presented themselves so long ago, when everyone knew what it meant to say, “I have been born here”?

This is not to say waiting is harmful. As long as there is scaffolding to provide form for the emerging structure, one should be able to stand onsite and watch a thing grow. I took on weight as a young woman to counter the fluctuations within me—the identities that swelled and diminished so frequently that no one could remember my name. Somehow I thought a heavy body would ground me—well, that is how it seemed to work

in the world of objects. And it was true: the larger I grew the more people called out to me. So much so that my name no longer seemed mine. It became something that people could say without me, in the next block over, then the next cit, then in other countries, finally other languages. Soon, I would discover, my name did not need my body.

After five or so blocks, the bungalows revert back to apartment buildings. I walk past these too, waiting for the light, waiting for change, waiting to remember where I am going, to touch the Amharic note in my pocket, the book of the Poet of Architecture. I wait, wondering if I have eaten properly today. Yes, it is true that often no one makes us wait as much as we do ourselves. As I enter the grid of streets called Labash Centali, as I am reassured by its hectic pace that this is the technology district that I’m touring, that everyone I

pass is programming, as I think, well as long as people are programming . . .

As I wait, Ravicka continues its decay, but also something else I cannot name.

It is amazing that I left the house without ceremony, that only in those first moments of walking down my steps did I panic about what was forthcoming: the moment of my coming into appearance. "In three hours," I could barely pronounce in my nervousness, "I will have to tell the story of my walking."

—"What's that?" my neighbor Bulcsú asked.

—"But at the same time, I will have to untell it."

It does not take long to move from one cit to another in Ravicka. This city was constructed with many ideas in mind. As a democratic gesture or a giving-in to indecision, each faction was allowed to do what it wished with its own demarcated space. Cit Sahaly evokes af-

fluence with its smooth, rounded surfaces and generous parks, while Besing prides itself on its seventy-plus museum buildings, many of which look like airport hangers turned on their sides. A planner, in another area, maintains that public spaces should be cramped, that a certain spontaneity of design would encourage residents to take risks in their lives. That same planner might argue that all the "elegance" of cit Sahaly served only to numb people.

I recall, in my youth, the voices of adults—using the soft, slurred sounds of exhaustion—wanting to agree on "The City" before they parted for the night. It was never one thing that created the impasse: these friends of my parents wanted to talk about the flow of traffic and the increasing verticality of residential homes while at the same time deciding which kind of roast suits which coffee in which neighborhood, as if the confluence of these things was in fact what made a city itself. Even when most areas were already constructed,

the debates continued. Even today when our buildings are returning to their original isolated in situ parts, we are still talking.

Today is stunning. Things appear to have changed in the days I spent holed up in my apartment. The usual yellow has a sidereal look about it, and as I pass through I am brushing a glitter from my skin. But, why talk about the air here if this is a translation you are reading? I will tell you about it and you will read me saying the word "yellow" and think to yourself science fiction. Well, perhaps I do have a complaint for my translators, especially those moving from Ravic to English. Why when I say *dahar* do you say "yellow"? I know that word. The air here is not yellow. It is *dahar* (yellow). If you are engaged in a translation and discover that a quality you need to convey does not exist in your language, the language into which you are moving, do not pick the next best thing. Sometimes you will have to put a "0" there; this will indicate a hole.

The Ravickians know about this. If you do not acknowledge the ignorance you bear, then the places where you have facility in speaking will seem crowded and dull. This is not new: you need nothing to see something, which is the theory behind white space.

Nevertheless, the day is beautiful for one who is returning to her intimates. I walked these same streets almost a week ago, but with my old mentality—"without an actual boundary to cross, I will never reach you." I did not arrive anywhere. I passed places that I thought could have been for me; I walked up to their doors, but never entered them. At the market I thought, "This is a logical place to be." But after visiting a few stalls, still empty-handed, I decided that I was not there. I was not at the bank to withdraw money for bills. I did not buy a hammock for my garden. Jili Harass did not meet me at Café Balva for an interview. The opening of the Sisi Sondergaard exhibit at Fog Gallery did not occur for me. Nothing has happened for weeks, though I struggle

to prove this. People will never believe you are "without events." And that is why decay is slow, and why it is not devastation.

Ciut Centali is not in ruins, though the paper ran an article today that said it was. The author of that great feat of error claims that there are "now" three blocks where over fifty percent of the buildings are vacant and missing their marquee. "These same buildings that ten years ago signaled vitality and economic promise for this once degenerate area." She also maintains that the inhabitants of these buildings "either have fled or been disappeared." Wrong. That would never happen here; we would never accept such government erasures (as they do in Bashir). I know this. I have been born here. This same article details "ornamental crumbling" on some of the "major streets"—enough! Where is all of it? Here I am, where is it?

I have encountered some rubble near the Opera House. Obviously, it is from somewhere else. Some fool came and dumped it here. "Damn it!" I am forced to shout. I look around. Downtown is not lively today; the mood makes me suffer. This path I chose—it is not the way back to society. I have a book, *Getting You Back Outside*, and this scene contradicts it horribly. I know I will not get anywhere, if I treat these streets as portals.

Sifting through the projected rubble, I see that people have begun discarding their memorabilia. I have found several reels of film that I presume to be home footage; their labels give their origins away—"Doğans 1986," "The Parkers at Elsetjet." Besides these clues, the genre just seems obvious. Plus, these are not Ravickian names, and this strengthens my theory about the rubble. All from elsewhere. In some other place, citizens are riding themselves of their keepsakes by secreting them between rocks piled onto beds of departing trucks. It's a strange rhythm. Those trucks then illegally deposit

their wares here and leave these signatures behind. Now that I have uncovered the mystery, what shall I do?

What is truly declining in Ravicka is the ability to get valuable information to those who most need it. There is no corps to centralize this intelligence. What I have to say is not pending, otherwise I could send it to the Pending Bureau, nor is it viral (because our clinics are intact); it is circumstantial and there is no place for that.

Unable to move away from the rubble, I decide to become more sleuth in my investigation. I want to know how many families or members of families (no need to assume that the expulsion was a group effort) took part in these strange events. I find a short stick and begin dividing the large pile. I have not given an estimate of its size because I have never fully understood "squared feet" or "cubic meters." I am hoping that "large" and "dusty" will give you an idea. Time is passing, but not

yet chronically. Why put this absurd pile in this place, this particular spot? The building it fronts is unassuming—twelve floors, a small carpeted lobby. I pull on the door to see if it will open. It will not. When you are at a house and ring but no one answers you take a step back and scale (with your eyes) to the upper windows; the gesture gives you a clue as to how long before the door is opened. When it is a corporate building, first you are surprised to find the door locked—it is the afternoon—so to bounce back, you scrutinize the area to your right. Can you make out anything through the tinted glass of the façade? Is there a guard lounging about inside? Must one apply for entrance, or perhaps just press this buzzer? The apparent answer to these questions is no. I return to the pile.

Working diligently, I manage to secure eighteen reels in fifteen minutes. I make a stack of them a little farther down the block, mentally assigning catalogue numbers. I keep picking because I am not sure what will happen

once I say I am finished. The possibility that someone will come along and attempt to engage me in conversation gives me a chill. The stack grows and my digging remains constant.

Surnaming does not compel me. I am looking for someone in this pile to have been more original in her cataloguing, to have marked her films with titles such as "After the Shade" or "Walking in Bruens" instead of giving these last names. The Doğans must recognize that they will only ever know obscurity. I have done as much as I am willing to do, now staring at the shortest pile. This one where the names have been crossed through. Both crossed through and discarded, I think, not exactly living.

I cannot be certain how much time I have lost since I left my flat, but it feels like seven weeks. Zàoter is still on the horizon, as are Ana Patova and the others. My behavior, however solitary in nature, propels me for-

ward. But how will I enter? It will be difficult to perform *pareis* with my arms full of film reels. —My translators will have been stumped in finding an equivalent for *pareis*. There is no correspondent anywhere; no culture performs as extensively as the Ravickians. You cannot enter a place without proving to the occupants that you have a body. Not just to display the limbs and skin you carry around with you, but to prove you are in dialogue with them. I could never enter a performance hall with my arms full. —And I am tired of this short pile. What is the thing I need to remember so to move on? What is that sound in the distance? It is odd that I found this place today, that today I read that article of our ruins and found myself here. Odd, because the first place I decide to stop as part of my great dissociative walk toward "home," this dump site, has held me intractably. For seven weeks—it seems—I have wondered how I will leave here. "I am stuck," I shout for effect. "Stuck, stuck!" for emphasis.

I had been underway yet now I am not.

It has to do with the stacks, I know. I have not divided them properly; I have not divined their origins. The sixth stack of documentaries, for instance, has some foreign entry. But I am not going to fish it out without a source book. I put all these together for a reason. There was something common between them. If it is possible to chip away at something while at the same time building it then that is what I have been trying to do. Making eleven stacks of ten documentaries amid rubble with enough distance between each to make the whole scene look collegiate and strange. I was trying to find both death and life in it.

This city opens and closes as I squander the day here, the season.

Ana Patova, I thought of architecture too. When I was most upset, I turned to it. However, I never wrote about it explicitly. I wrote about people in cities, people on trains, but could never bear the daunting topic of structure. But any Ravickian at-large, touring the pavements of this city, must begin to see: the decay of Und Ravidjka is not the result of meddling from our contentious neighbors or other faraway enemy states. Rather, it is an internal disabling. But, I will not go so far as to say we are wrecked through to the beams—because declaring that would require the courage of an activist, which I am not—but I will say this:

The door I face needs to open when I twist its knob and not stay in this refusal of space.

The problem is I think I have been repeating these words for a while and the place has not responded.

That is not a city. For Ravicka to be so still means that it is dying. What other explanation could there be? And yet I vehemently object to the article in today's paper that made as if we lay in tangible crumbles. I felt strong when I left the house those many eras ago.

I Thought of Architecture (the book) would help me had I packed it among my things today. If only to feel the weight of it in my hands. Ana Patova must have had to think through Ravicka's disconsolation. Of course, at that time—nearly a decade ago—the signs would have been barely perceptible. Even now, it is only the smallest things that indicate we are not moving forward. But it is when you move among your subject—in this case, the buildings—that you see the underlying weakness. Were I ever able to stay at home or at least stay away from city structure I would not know to write this. My mystery series would be a hit.

In choosing to use the term "Installation" instead of the more familiar "Chapter" to section her book, Ana

Patova had to have contemplated destruction. Well for a long time, as a thing is being made, you cannot tell whether it is growing or dying. It is possible to confuse one for the other in this life. To think of architecture in its rawest rubble-state, is to do what, Ana Patova? I am rooted here waiting to know. Is it possible that someone will be sent to find me?

A breeze kicks up foreign dust.

That I managed to make it to the Mohaly district in this condition just goes to show the misalignment of time to emotion. My heart, I believe, is still riveted to that pile, but I do not need it to understand where I am. Mohaly makes itself known. You feel its presence around you: the crowding of cafes, boutiques, fruit stands. Unlike the past, you do not feel the throng of people, but, like the past, the smell of flowers comes strong. Being here could save you from yourself, if only you would open up to the experience, to adopting a happy posture of prominence. Before the despair, it was quite ordinary to see that look as you walked around. People just proud to be outside in tailored clothing. There is a little less enthusiasm right now. But if I stand here and concentrate, can't I bring about the scene?

Someone ought to arrive. Even if we have lost everything, there ought to be people.

The nearest person is down the block, leaning against a closed newspaper stall. I can see the bridge stretch behind him toward cit Sahaly and the Ulnyadin Museum. I wonder how long, if I venture, will it take to reach him. What if—though I am moving—I never arrive? Impossible. But if the distance between us is unalterable, if this particular man is made to always be that many feet away from me, then it is true that we might never touch. I do not want to touch him. Well, bow and close my eyes to him, perhaps.

It is always a stranger you spot on a deserted street, never a long lost friend, never Ana Patova. Were she here I could gesture toward the bridge and perhaps see tears fill her eyes. For her to become a mirror or a film projecting the time that has passed between us. It is not her, much less a woman of any sort. I think seeing a woman would calm me in the face of our declining architecture. I am not seeing a woman, but just asking for her has improved my mood somewhat. I can move toward this man who remains in his spot.

Is he looking at me?

I am moving and relieved to say that the space between us is diminishing. As I near him, though, I find the open door of Hans' bookshop equally compelling. It would be smart to decide which way to go before I arrive there, as I have never enjoyed forks in the road. The last time I was in Hans' I was devastated to discover that section A had been eliminated from the store. I wanted to ask Hans why—we are acquaintances—but I could not shake the idea that he should have alerted me of this change as soon as I had entered. My name is Luswage Amini. And even though it would be ridiculous to presume I was there to purchase my own books, it is not unfathomable that I would, at least, want to visit them. It is not everyday that one finds oneself an author, much less multiply. Yet that day I visited, there were no rows of A. I did not stand there staring at the Health Pamphlets that had taken their place, waiting to be noticed. Hans knew what was happening. I did

not need to perform confusion. But why did he not say anything? On the other hand, I could not pretend I was not affected. So I ventured to the stack of L and started shifting the books about noisily, as if I had been a Luswage all along. I made quite a racket, seeming relentless. Hans came over and said kindly, "Gurantai Dis Amini." I responded with forced clarity (I mean, what was I doing?), "A 'rantai, my cousin." Then there was a bit of awkwardness. But not for long; I turned to my left, and even though this book was also absent I knew I could say its name.

"Hans," I inquired, newly smiling, "haven't you got Zàoter Limici's *Szmeschingli*?"

This ingenuity seemed to relieve him as well.

"Dis 'A, we sold the last one yesterday . . ." He lost steam quickly. He looked like he wanted to say something. Both pride and alarm colored his face. He opened his

mouth, said a few words then stopped. I wanted to help. In a brave gesture, he turned his body toward the missing stacks, yet again faltered in speech.

"A Collector?" I said, encouragingly. He nodded. "I sold a . . . collector . . . A." "In its entirety," I almost shouted, not quite a question, as the truth was evident. "Total," he answered in a quiet voice. "He wanted everything." "And you said 'yes'?" I could not help asking, anger overwhelming me.

Did Hans understand the magnitude of what he had done?

When there is so little left you do not give it all to one; you fight to keep that thing in the mainstream. What could be worth that kind of sacrifice, literally ridding your house of its first step? My upbringing prevented me from asking, though Hans read the accusation on my face. "It will come back," he stammered.

Nothing comes back as itself. How could it when an entirely new set of forces leaps upon it as soon as it leaves your sight? I did not want to sever relations with Hans. I could never erase his bookshop from my map, even if it no longer represented me. I have walked this block for fifty-five years. And thus my point—this is no time to erase things. We have a crisis here in Ravicka; the things we still have a hold of must remain static. But does not the encounter with Hans prove that we have nothing? I can recall the devastated look on his face when I backed out of the door, only half performing *pareis*. His surrendering of his books was the exact kind of extinction-event that should have convinced me that everything that once was is no longer. I let that event lapse from my mind completely, unable to bear it. And had hoped it vanquished somehow.

Does it matter where I stop or do all scenarios render this nothing clamoring about you? Correction. It is not "nothing;" in fact, it is the opposite, but so much that thing it empties me just the same. The Mohaly-Sahaly bridge arches away from me, its polished beauty in direct contradiction to the city's decline. Holding time. Am I to walk toward it? Were I to take as many steps, Ana Patova would have to match me in her script. Otherwise, I think. Today it would not be possible to cross that bridge without having an encounter with her. Yet I cannot imagine she is anywhere near me just now. Perhaps later, in the performance hall, where the others will be as well. But not here, where this hole I have formed with my thinking could be so easily filled. This would not be a city if she were. I mean, were there not this hole . . . it would not be.

I had thought, leaving that rubble pile, that I was walking toward a "sound in the distance," but now that I am here I realize that the thing I had noticed was not sound; it was a pattern. The light of cit Mohaly. Against its buildings.

Thirty years ago, Ana Patova and I thought we could pass our lives on this bridge, held in this conversation. Then, it seemed that the grip that fixed us there was beginning to loosen and something had to change. Perhaps, to put a table and drinks between us. But in which place? There were reasons for choosing either: cit Sahaly because it was gorgeous and ancient and from it we could watch the spectacle at the other end of the bridge, or cit Mohaly because it was the spectacle. These are my divisions, in retrospect. I cannot say as clearly what I understood then. Ana Patova had an extraordinary face—this is one thing. She was a thinker; we had that book in common. She was not exactly Ravickian. These pieces I have extracted from my soft memory. There are many more. Did I dream people smiling at us? Did she grab my hand?

It must have been cit Sahaly that we chose. This would have provided the better adventure, since neither of us

lived there, and perhaps it was felt that we needed to move away from what was familiar. But you look back and realize how strange it is to make a decision, because you know that choosing to do one thing makes it impossible to do something else. You do the thing you chose but always there is this ghost of what would have happened had you . . . That a walk toward home would have implanted the combining shape of two in your bed, or that the Mohalai light would have made living apart inconceivable—unfortunately, there were no indications that the actions to which you did commit would have necessitated the opposite.

I have flattened this point with my urgency. Looking at the side of a building, believing I see water there. The tributaries we are missing.

It is important that I do not just stand here.

I move toward a sign for the underground.

I was not asleep. I was on a train. We were not moving. I grabbed my pen from my bag and made copious notes. I am not sleeping. I remind myself to remain wary of translators, to speak plainly. This crazy tubular transport, these faces, the few of them. Our trains are running. How can this be? There are eight cars, yet no more than three or four people in each. I get on board to escape myself, yet I am still with me. It would be good to talk to the other riders. But which one and for how long? And why must this always be me—conceding to reach? I get angry, clenching my fist, but remain smiling. I want to talk. If it is my role to build this bridge, why am I constantly failing—

—“Gurantai,” it finally penetrates my fog.

—“A ’rantai, my cousin,” I quietly return. I consider this person who has spoken to me. “Where is this train go-

ing?” And for some reason I add, “Do you think,” as if nothing is any longer certain.

—“It says it’s an Hilalyi-bound train.” The stranger slides into the seat next to me. “But if everyone gets off at Lzcsebé, I doubt the conductor will go farther. Do you know where you want to go?”

—“People still disembark there?”

—“Lzcsebé? Of course . . . to go to the fruit market, when it was lively, to shop for leather when there was a surplus, to navigate the docks . . .” I do not know if she is aware that she is not speaking presently. We are both quiet now. I can see she is working up to say something.

—“Are you Dis Amini?”

—“I am Dis ’A.”

After more silence, feeling that I need to elaborate, I say, “It has been many days since I spoke my name.” She looks at me encouragingly, as if now I will recite the whole thing, with all the traditional bows and squeaks. I cannot though, too much has happened. It is not only

that the edges that define this city are curling up and inward but also that the air with which to speak is lessening. I think it would make me sick to say more than a few words, ever, to do more than hold my body straight, ever. It is obvious that she wants more from me. That in being Dis 'A I should be more.

I refuse *pareis* or it refuses me. I do not try very hard—not with my body—but I open a corner of my mind, diffidently. If she touched me, that would make it easier. But in Ravicka it is too confusing for strangers to touch without that initial deep bow to elevate it.

—“What is your name?” Returning my eyes to her face.

“What do they call you?”

—“Elan . . . Zôtovichzy.”

—“Menje.”

—“Menje.”

Then everything that is proper to say becomes unutterable. For my part, the words simply will not come. I

shape my mouth around the impulse and even add breath; no sound comes. I stop trying. I tap my pen against the window. I think maybe I have not observed this woman enough. Elan seems held up by fear. She thinks I am someone and she is alone with me. What does she do with this opportunity? All the while, the train runs locally on the eastside of the city. And eventually will run out of stops. Soon, I will have to get off and make my way back in the direction of Vonzy.

—“Zàoter Limici is reading tonight. Did you know that?” I am able to say. It is shocking to appear so ordinary. When everything I feel is much larger than this space. When I am on this train because of what I feel. Yet the screen does not translate. It is supposed to read “murky,” but I am concerned it does not.

Little has been said about Ravicka's future, in whose hands it rests. If the adage is correct, then it should be with our young. But what allows one to grow old is stability and recognition. We have not had those things.

So is anybody old?

I have to close my eyes after thinking this. Elan is saying something. I do not wish to open them anymore.

Is it true that her palm is now flattened against my chest, but she is silent? Has the train's engine been cut? Will it reverse its course? Before or after it is purged of its content? Soon, no matter my debilitations, will I be standing outside of this train? An arrival?

The hand lifts from my chest. I think. Something lands in my lap. It weighs very little so I remain. In a lightless refusal, except that there is always light.

—"Dis Amini," Elan comes. "You don't have to go."

You say those words to persons you think are about to flee, as a way to stall their defection. But they are so

inlaid in the puzzle of the situation that they cannot hear you. They nod and look down at the package in their laps, perhaps even with their eyes glistening. The gesture is not an invitation to convince them. "You don't have to go" even bears weight politically. Sometimes people say these words and they mean the opposite: if you are smart you will go. Go means leave, vacate, but it also means journey, attend. [Luswage Amini nods and says "I know" and Elan Zôtovichzy squeezes her hand.]

Even though I did not set out to close down the conversation this was the result. I failed in my reach. How long, I wonder, will it take for the next person to show up, out of that number of persons wading through time toward me? That group I mentioned earlier, one of which we all have. And am I in your group?

Miraculously, the train arrives in Hilayli, a district on the outskirts of the city, in its northeastern corner. It makes no sense to get off—it's nearly twilight and if I wait a few more moments the train will reverse its course. I get off, because how much longer can I sit here feeling this strange.

After everything I have said it should not surprise you to hear that the platform is empty, and as I look beyond the rail-yard (sensing the train pull away behind me) I am oddly comforted by Hilayli's vast emptiness. The scene looks as though it might be a beginning—something I could be a part of. I see that I am drawn toward the grasses, that after the last car moves out of the range of my hearing, all that is left is their sound. Golden and overgrown this time of year. The nearest structures are so far out I cannot name them. I venture to say they are tombstones, but that does not fit the picture. Hilayli

is famous for its sculpture gardens so perhaps this is a long view of one of those. But in my immediate area—the soft, giant grasses. You can hear them because of the Balşa wind, which blows through this district continually, and can see them because nothing obstructs the falling light. Walking among the grasses I could be in any time.

Every person who visits Hilayli does exactly what I am now doing. And it is not just that I have come here today enacting this pattern, but that any day I have ever been here, I have done this thing. I am wandering through the grasses, counting out steps to the hidden paths. I trace one of the paths to the desired spot; I lie down then slowly begin to curl over in sleep.

Golden grasses and yellow air do not make a blur of things, as one who has never seen this sight might think they would. It is amazing the way objects bearing

such likeness separate themselves in Ravicka—since when you wake from having been asleep outside, you will want to discern things immediately. The shapes engulfing you. Even when there are only two shapes: sky and grasses.

It is unfortunate that as a child I could not come to Hilayli on my own. The reasons for my chaperones were obvious. I was not a strong child. I needed guidance; I needed help through the turnstiles. But had I been able to create a childhood in which I was accustomed to lying in the grasses alone—so attuned to the silence surrounding that I did not become hyperconscious of myself as I now am—had I developed in such solitude I do not think I would wander Ravicka's desolation as this medium. This drought would be comprehensible.

The way you come to Hilayli as a child is with a clan of familiars, baskets of food, and blankets tied with old shoestrings. You all bustle out of the train doors and

speed down here to the grasses; you act as one and speak simultaneously. And when you are a teenager, you do not think of Hilayli because of all the families there. Then you are an adult and soon you forget all the possibilities of becoming, except the self you have chosen. Many years go by, the city is the only thing in sight. Hilayli is in that part of your mind that you would call country if you ever thought about it. The country re-enters your thoughts when life in the city goes wrong, when windows empty of people and no one calls you anymore.

I thought of architecture when the city was held away from me, when I was sequestered with a virus. I pondered it even before Ana Patova made it her moniker. The city is a system of streets, canals, and vertical structures. It has a published shape, represented on many walls in many districts and handed out in folds at the Tourist Bureau, and it bears an imaginary form. You will guess imaginary forms to be divergent: mine does not resemble yours. But if I love the same city you love, our maps should be interchangeable.

Whose map marks this tiny place Hilayli with a star—mine or yours? I would have thought my map too full of monuments and corner shops to lead me here, especially today when I know where everyone else is. There is little time before Zàoter's great night begins. Also, I am too far away and hungry to go on in this way. If I

keep sitting here in the grasses I will have to remain here. It will be impossible to move unless someone comes to get me, which cannot happen anytime soon. Many people are missing from the city proper, but no official would ever think to come out here in search of them. Much less, me. In Ravicka, the missing ones are said to have gone (or been taken) further in, never outside the structure.

So to go on, I must undo everything I have just done. Difficult when I have nothing but praise for the grasses.

That this is the same day as that of the courier bustling between my house and the house of Ana Patova. That I found no other means than the train to return me to the city. That this is a plate of greens from Lefits' garden over which I sit. Thinking about the house of Ana Patova, how the courier must have been astonished as he first approached it. I have not seen her house in years, but I suspect that it has only become more circular over the duration. As the Balša pushes against it. I do not know the technical way of saying the wind of the Balša has, over the years, rounded Ana Patova's house, which sits at a high elevation (though not as high as the old homes of cit Ramtala), into the strangest, most uncategorical shape. I have established that it is round; I also want to say it is vertical. The wind has curved the wood and expanded the wood; it has blown the wood so smooth that parts resemble glass. The curve instead of becoming more arched over time has become more

vertical. Ana Patova has had to rid the front of the house of windows.

The courier must have been winded from the climb and must have found it difficult to catch his breath and speak at the same time. I imagine him dropping his bike and running the path to her door, which is now at the side of the house. I remember when I was last there how difficult it was to resist continuing around the circle—past the door, through the garden, following the logic of the curve, finding oneself back at the door. The courier perhaps admonished his gaping mouth.

But there was the ride, the structure, the extension of the arm and message attached, and, I am sure, a beautiful Ana Patova calmly opening the door. I would think it excruciating to close your mouth.

Being inside, waiting, while Ana Patova writes a return response, the courier must be confounded to see the interior so angular. How is this possible? From outside,

there is no basis for those unbending interventions dividing space. Think about it as hard as you might.

The courier gives in to the expanse of his mouth.

Ana Patova is saying, "This is a very strange house," to reassure him. All the while deciding what words to use to most effectively mystify me. I have the note here. I have not forgotten it. "So it's very strange," the courier hears her plainly.

Over the years, she has managed to find furniture to complement the awkward lines of the walls and points out her newest acquisition to the courier . . .

The proprietor of Lefits brings me back.

"Bezérul, one more please," I ask sleepily over the newspaper.

"Is it very bad?" He asks me about the news, though he knows the answer as well as anyone does.

"Nothing has changed so much, Bezul." I close the paper. He leaves and returns a moment later with a coffee. We are silent for some time. Bezul gazes out a window that opens onto the street. Perhaps weighing something.

"You've read Cucek's translation?" he asks me eventually.

What is it that makes me stare into my cup? "I have the book right here. Have you seen it?" As I wait for his response, I ask myself, Is it good that I have Cucek with me?

His silence is unsettling. I think about the book in my bag, the person Sirin Cucek, who will be among us tonight, who is beloved by all. I discover nothing. I touch the book; I think about architecture, and something small appears on the horizon. I hold there a moment,

then, as that thought begins to connect with others, I look up from my cup. Bezérul has been waiting, my dinner plate in his hand. "Is it true that Cucek favored Bleetsgat over Mohaly in her translation?"

"I heard some have discerned that," I said, "But . . ."

"But Dis Amini has doubts."

"I have doubts Bezérul Lefts," I deliver heavily as if there is nothing worse. "And will it help us to see we are mentioned, to believe the poet of architecture knows us?"

Many people think so, I answer myself, though not in speech.

"Will you all come by tonight?" asks Bezul, to relieve us of this subject.

"You've had word of Zàoter's reading." I inflect as if I have done something wrong. Of course, he would have

seen the notice in the paper; also he has many friends in the scene—they would have told him. My response suggests I wish him not to have known. His face shows its effect. I reach out with my mind to grab the misrepresentation before it penetrates him and remember how the outside confuses me lately. Events do not unfold, as they should—the simplest, most benign gestures often ending in sadness. Even when you are discussing the health benefits of tamarind you look up and find tears in the other's eyes, that person no less confused than you.

"I hope more than anything," I amend, "that *djor bleje* (the great walk) brings us back here." [Luswage Amini lowers her head and swipes her hand across the surface of her right shoe—from the tip to just below the ankle—and rests there, feeling one fold of her waist curl into the other. Bezérul Lefts reaches down, touches with his left hand the tip of her right and quickly tugs the laces that are gathered there. As they begin to rise, he takes her left hand into his right and does *fylô* exquisitely.]

PLEASE WELCOME ZÀOTER LIMICI

My Cousins . . .

Thank you. Thank you all for coming.

Tonight I have the honor of facing what journalists have begun to call the “true remains” of the city, you, its placeholders, as if it is only by the noise of our living that this devastation is constituted “a place.” But what city is not qualified by the ongoing of its inhabitants? As long as Ravicka glows this beautifully, it will remain . . . I don’t need to tell you this. You have come tonight; it is tremendous for me to see you. That people can still gather to complete the exchange of writing means we have not lost all . . . I have had immense difficulty of late . . . our struggle is not so old that I can’t remember a time

before the void, before this insufferable silence came down upon us. Crowded by it, in this space tonight. But we are a public! So I thank you, *astanga lô* . . . is the microphone sounding? Good. Among the things I brought with me . . . this image of the paved road, on which I place a car. Wet driving with no map. Going forward, never to be stopped. There is another road that feeds the one where the car has gone; it ends abruptly and becomes a third, where there is less light. The car skids along and damaged inside hands grip with panic and a desire to let go. Bearing this news of destruction and carrying it over distances on nothing but fumes, it's powered from outside reality. Why drive then? Why let down the window for air? The paving unselfishly black with yellow stripes, smooth skin of territory, long night for people who don't want to drive anymore. People crouched and blurred beside the road. Do not drive any farther. The yellow becomes black

becomes yellow becomes full of faces and uncertain direction with this driving; one hand on the wheel, the other bandaged in lap, in pain . . .

Excuse me. This is not the piece I meant to read. Is today Tuesday? I'm shaking my head because only an old man would stop in the middle of what he's doing to correct his mistake. You don't have to tell me. I already see the face of my friend here. "Zàoter, you cannot stop what you have begun unless there is an emergency," she wants to say. I have been forlorn, dear one.

It is disconcerting to read this page in Ravicka, tonight, without having talked to each of you first, to pretend that I'm not desperate to know what you have been doing. Is time still possible? Will our persistence—in staying—open up a new

space? I want . . . if I keep shuffling these papers
you will think me even older than I am. I want to
read the poem about buildings.

At Vonzy Hall you must start with the buildings.
And thank you. Thank you for being here. May I
say not everyone has come? When I left my house
this evening, I saw my friend Fataki moving in the
opposite direction of the Hall. There was some
awkwardness between us.

The blinding, pent-up of trying to get a message
to the next place, what we will become *bas*
devrojaljin (after the rain). Of moving so quickly
from where we are that the words are erased by
force of trying. Stopping and changing the mode
of transportation is the only way to convey the
message, looking beyond matter to do so . . . I
have a poem:

I was once
I was once in a movie

a great
house

isolated
by fire

the heat
a voice of
leaving

called out

but did not speak

the space
behind the voice

years before
I saw the imprint

Cousins, when you are writing, it is always the
other place that haunts you. The place you just
were. For most of my life I have regretted the

decisions that saved me. Yes, these last-minute departures have made me safer in the world, but my days pass as if I am missing something. The gossips say it's impossible to hear happy stories in Ravicka. In Belgium, they're saying this.

But receiving—whether it is by listening or reading—is a matter of waiting. We know this.

I have made a habit of staying in one place and looking outward, through screens and other people's books. I have tried to be ready.

But Fataki wanted to carve a festoon tonight instead of attending this . . . well, it hasn't become a reading yet, has it? This *preliminary* I'll say . . . He said it would be better to have been carved into a building, instead of this "field of study," in that way architects have of speaking. "Then you could talk truthfully about light," he said.

Duder Bello, thank you for having me. When I left my seat and walked through all your clapping, thoughts unrelated to poetry arose in my head. When I reached the podium and began talking, scenes that didn't concern reading were going on. I pretended I was one. But I confused myself and drew from my stack incorrectly. This is how you have heard of the paved road before the illustrious building.

This stack.

First the rocks fell
forgive the building
place where there were no rocks
the brick buildings. A monument
named

the crowd that formed
arose

a public feeling

—construction over eating—

and built a city of that

A woman
appeared, began
reading

lines

ten hands
the people
separating
into states

rubble
in the air
they breathed

I set out one day to undo what I'd done, to put
silence where before there'd been an uproar. I
wanted to enter a time of peace, even if there was

no peace around me. At first, little happened; I
walked the city and the noise held. I stared at
buildings, labeled them with my gaze. After a
long time, I noticed the first change—the rain
falling soundlessly. Then, it was the step of
pedestrians. I thought I had erased myself. I don't
remember what it was that alerted me: I was only
in a poem.

. . . Fataki said to "speak of pain when you have
none . . ."

Sunday 3 .

the folds of Mohaly
in crepuscular late
afternoon, your winter
fear
across the great

arch weakening

a person
falls

at times

 to his knees
and every Vlati
 carries you
 constant

Mohaly
 light
 folding

I have written poems to speak to the contours of
Ravicka. For every oblong window of the train
station, I have constructed my own oblong
phrasing. Not long ago, I awoke from a dream
with the sense that I had been called into action.
A voice—of the city, I thought—saying, “Read
what you’ve written to me.” It was just after

dawn. I dressed, gathered my notebooks, and ran
outside.

I stood in the green of morning. Where were the
buildings? There was no city. I was stunned that
my dream had led me here. If we can’t trust the
voices in our heads, where are we? As the sun
rose, I felt weighed down by description, those
books in my hand. But I couldn’t bear what I was
seeing either—the obliteration of form. The
ultimate evacuation. So I began reading—the
poems weren’t mine—and soon I realized, neither
was my voice. It was the dream within a dream.

Poem for the builder in us:

The Fandrei archive
spills its inessentials
onto Lefa street
where no one ventures
 the incalculably split

unviewable

that it is there the archive

and Fandwej the real

smolders inconsequently
for now

it's now
that worries him

We find we are often discussing the Fandrei
estate, and Fandrei, don't we? As more
posthumous works appear, he seems less and less
to have been one person living in one time. The
poem I just read was written the day after his
Pictures of Gasser was released from Salzmun
Nationale. In his lifetime, Fandrei captured our
city magnificently; in some cases, his images
supplanted the real. He showed us Monheim and

Shlöder rivers when they were all but forgotten.
But these pictures of Gasser—how can you speak
well of photographs that only manage to blur
what is already inscrutable—a mad crowd bolting
out of a front door? How can you access the
clicker's perception? Is this just the present he is
trying to show me? Cousins . . . I see I've made
some of you uncomfortable. Our dear
Comptroller is tearing his hair out. Let me
explain: I am not saying, get rid of these pictures.
This is my comment:

Unseen as in
 my eye

the boy's club
their dramatics

a father who'd
never put a levee
of that

against
a rush of water

something broke

was going
too fast

and nothing
did appear
that was not
annihilated
by the present

still the pails
going after it

Where I do understand the blur is in the past few days of Fataki's fever. My friend who seems to grow more despondent as each of his buildings is abandoned. He is drawing with fury, and, sadly, no purpose. Plans for a vacant lot and the next

day a new set of plans . . . the same lot—structures that couldn't be more opposed. Constructing into the sky in one proposal then bringing the whole thing down to one extended horizontal plane in the next.

Fataki is not alone in his fever; I don't mean to isolate him. We are all doing our things more erratically, easy to attribute this to the despair. But why surrender the idea of permanence? Must we lose faith in structure . . . I am being polemical and not reading, which is why you've come tonight. I look up and you change my mind about what I want to do and I think I better just move to the next piece . . . not leave you sitting there wondering what the hell is going on.

The paved road is a story and a poem. The poem is preceded by two in my new work, two crowd-infused poems.

whereby the monument
goes unsung this year

the people see it

but without praise

—that Vlati
built this thing

time falls on it
and us differently

we cannot stand
the mess it makes

ignoring the safety
between people

how it became its opposite

in nine
years existing

must have been
the illustrious crowd

Vlati spoke of

we were that crowd
we are
not now it

*

Standing — is it that I'm
standing

I wrote this one for Hans Faverey, "Were he still here"

Standing — is it that I'm
standing

is it you
who are next to me

in front of me

this food line
for individuals

where are we going
did I come with you

so the bell rang
and we
congregated here

with our notebook-pails
reaching

we were moving
you said
we were
moving

the steps
represented years

our people
fell off
entangled streets
a hand
reached out

Fataki . . . wanting to carve that festoon. Ravicka's lawlessness is terrifying. What keeps the rest of us from digging holes into our great buildings? Is it that agreement we made of citizenry, when there was once a clear civic body? Were the Permits Office available would it admonish Fataki? You have to know that his name isn't Fataki. There are authorities out there somewhere, and even though he's a vandal I've sworn my life to him. It has to do with the paved road.

Trying to get to the next place through this one, which has no passageways. Sealed-up refuge. The driver in the car does not recognize the people on

the street, though he's spent the day with them. A hand in pain clutching the wheel. The rally did not go over. Escape this way or be abandoned this way, the trajectory will not change. Who said to go along this road, to look at these buildings, rub at their façades when there are so many other roads and buildings? He's here for the city center, for the crowds, the maps everywhere. What is given up to be found. To have this star that marks where he is, these hands, this fleeing . . . The driver turns left and pulls his car onto the sidewalk. He climbs out and looks at the windows above him. It's a narrow street. Not much goes on here. But he's quick to the house number that matches what he's memorized. Quick through the door, quick up the stairs.

The people on the street, crouched insides waiting to move away, have agreed that after a number of hours they won't exist anymore. Cleaner streets to replace these damaged ones.

The people are waiting for the pre-established sign. They will rise with remarkable coordination—despite stiff limbs, concrete abrasions—and wander off.

I have gone on too long, my cousins. And have brought the outside in with me. Your faces confirm it.

Fataki . . .

I have to tell you that in the time I've been standing here I have not understood why I conjured him, tonight. There must be more than the notion "he did not share this with me," which is almost a song now. You cannot guess how many songs I've sung since I got up here, and you are singing songs.

These remaining poems are all I have regarding our great bridges. I spent the morning worrying if I end here, right at this moment, would I leave

you with enough? I don't like the idea of your
emptiness. That's why we have ventured out in
our sleeping city, right? It is not possible to forget
the bridges. Yet, daily, we insulate against the
prospect. Stone doesn't vanish, though: it
explodes. And we are not doing that here.

Still I am near constantly rushing to the window
to confirm the arch of the Hdlät, which is the
highest and longest in Ravicka. I keep thinking,
should I announce who's here? Our dear one
who is practically a city herself. She shakes her
head begging anonymity. I won't say her name,
but I'll read the poem I wrote for her:

Night in those
books that lay

the city
of the center

in the crumble
structure

that voice
calling out

"names
that do
not know
other names"

from the center
of that thinking
deserted
city
your book

You know, in many ways, even in the time we have passed here, we have been moving toward change. Vlati knows we've laid a path of words. We hear that once all the water in Rija Teh is replaced with that from its neighbor Bläna we can start this city over . . . It's promising, but cousins perhaps you can help me understand: if our structures, bridges, and languages remain, if the light lands where it has always landed, and we keep our names, where will the new city go?

GRAND HORIZONTALS

Many languages of this region share the same word for
bridge. That word is most. —Ayşe Buldu

ONE

-This is Shumgater?

-Yes

-I would have not recognized it

-Don't worry

-Where has everything gone?

-It is here

-I don't see it

-It is here

-Do you see it Tomás Bello?

-I have seen it

-But, do you see it now?

-Shumgater is . . . second left from Pedr. Is that right?

And on the corner is the Libratorium Centrale; the public works building is on the next block. This one should be Kela bakery, but where is Luestr Tie shop?

-No longer there
 -Then, this is not Shumgater
 -Zàoter, help me. Our friends are downcast. Tell them
 we are here
 -We are here
 -Ana Patova?
 -We are
 -Shumgater would look this way?
 -At present, Duder Bello. The street itself
 -The train was shocking
 -What train?
 -The one I rode to Vonzy
 -Today, I also road a train: away from Vonzy then
 back to Vonzy
 -"Trains were shocking"
 -What is it, Zàoter?
 -"The crowd did not claim her"
 -Luswage
 -Yes, Ana Patova
 -Shumgater, this time of night, does resemble Toren.

Were it not for the view of the bridge there I would be
 full of doubt myself
 -But that is not the bridge
 -Duder Bello!
 -Levric Pelín, please assist me
 -No, it is not the bridge
 -Levric!
 -Well, the construction does block the view
 -And without the Lion's head
 -Zàoter, you mustn't get involved
 -I am with you Dis Amini
 -Yes, it is Toren
 -Ana Patova
 -Look, on Toren, the water valve was named. Here is one
 -On every strêet
 -Do you recall the ceremony? Vlati wanted everyone
 involved, but our very own Zàoter refused him
 -He has everything against Vlati
 -I am sad to say—
 -In defense of my absence

- We have reached a street sign
- Thank you. We can stop this game
- Dis 'A is the winner, of course
- Ana Patova?
- As if Shumgater will always belong to her, no matter
its condition
- Ana Patova?
- Yes

Two

- The bridge
- Most
- Whatever you can imagine
- Most
- Is not real
- I want to see Lefits soon
- But everyone has his way of getting there, and Pelín
leads us tonight
- In most Slavic languages
- I know
- Why haven't I seen you?
- You are never Ciut Centali
- You are not in Foldá . . . though everyone goes there.
The higher grounds remain
- We are not flood

-Most night
 -Most arching away from me
 -Tethered to interlocked languages
 -You are the one, Ana Patova. Where is that note?
 -You are shuffling; please do not move
 -How strange to revert to Amharic
 -What did you say?
 -This morning
 -Yes
 -I wrote: I'm coming. Say something. But I meant—
 get across to me
 -Luswage, it is not Amharic
 -
 -It is not
 -Ana Patova, what is wrong with the linear?
 -It has been deserted
 -When we had the river
 -Most river
 -In Basharac, we couldn't be together
 -Architecture

-Had lost favor, I know
 -So I did not use Basharac for your message
 -It was Amharic
 -It was not
 -Why does Pelin drag us over Sofia bridge to get us to
 Bleetsgat?
 -The tobacco we need
 -Most Sofia
 -It took you to say that
 -But Ana Patova
 -What else besides Architecture
 -The flight of birds
 -Over which . . . Amini
 -I have been thinking of the Hilayli grasses
 -Broken steps
 -Reflective surfaces
 -You are still thinking about trains
 -More, their tunnels
 -When I wrote you last fall
 -All you said was, "Luswage. Stop. Arrived late. Stop.

For recompense. Stop.”

–That is enough

–Is not enough

THREE

–Broken steps

–Those two

–They have much ground to cover

–I wonder if we should break off

–But women never finish

–Pelín with a heavy hand

–It is time to drink

–Lefts’ is near. Omer and Sirin Cucek are eager to go

–We all are

–Last time at Lefts’

–Omer drank too much and talked overlong about his
old days in Lebash

–“I scaled every building,” he loves to say

–But will Amini and Ana Patova talk to us?

–They never do, cousin

-What are you saying, Duder Bello?
 -Luswage Amini
 -Tomás Bello
 -I am still angry you did not marry me
 -A vrej de . . . pirim, pirim
 -Between bridge and water
 -Most surface
 -Ana Patova?
 -Duder Bello has never married and most of the time
 behaves like a solitary
 -He said "marry" but he meant
 -Pelín likes a long walk
 -You are welcome, Zàoter; walk next to me
 -If everyone could see them
 -What Duder? May I say I admired your performance
 tonight? For a moment I thought I would have to turn
 away, everything felt fragile. First, you didn't seem
 to want to be there. But you warmed up. You were
 astonishing
 -It was the insinuation of the paved road

-Zàoter
 -Ana Patova
 -What is that?
 -What?
 -About the paved road
 -As over crevices
 -Most road
 -Let's take these stairs
 -Broken, Pelín
 -But take them anyway
 -Thirsty
 -Thirsty
 -Hunger and thirst
 -My shoes conforming around my feet
 -Lefits' is through the next corridor
 -One should lean on another's shoulder
 -To show we have been brave, Amini?
 -To emphasize the extravagance of our walk

FOUR

- Duder Limici, while I have you to myself this moment may I ask you a few questions?
- Of course, Sirin Cucek, but then in return I want to know all about the Poet of Architecture
- Ah, "So that we don't betray hunger"
- On everyone's mouth
- That and the story of you and Fataki. There is a lot in the air about the paved road; that you both were counteracting in Bashir when the tragedy . . . but people can't figure out when it occurred
- Because we are no longer in argument with Bashir, we forget
- Right
- Your *pareis* is different. How is this so?
- I think it's my translation work. Do you know English?

- The speakers of that language, their foremost concern is shape into volume—putting the appropriate figure into the container that is made for it
- How is this done? Schlessner spoke of this, but he was not immersed as you are
 - As the mind gives forth speech—Schlessner called it "bandergewilden" (longing to be)—bridges are created. But they aren't beautiful; they are more like walkways. They are beautiful, but not treated as such. These bridges are the little words, the connectors, the articles, as they are called. Prepositions. English users pronounce the relations between things instead of performing them as we would. In translation, I am stuck between oratory and dance
 - Sirin Cucek dreams of this language?
 - At times Duder. But I have gone on when it is you who must speak
 - Why must I? I have little news
 - The paved road
 - But I do not see the past this way

-So this thing—of you and Fataki—is what you once did

-I would have you believe

-Because Zàoter Limici cannot exactly lie?

-Cannot exactly

-Your new poems, Duder, do they take a position on the despair, how we should take action toward it?

-Perhaps to get at it the back way?

-You have talked to others

-I am talking to you

-How long have you known Luswage Amini?

-We were children together

-And Ana Patova

-It is impossible to know her; she has not been born here

-Not traditionally, no. And . . . where we are right now, do you have ties to these buildings?

-Extreme ties, but I must not look at them

-For Fataki's sake?

-For the city

FIVE

-Bezérul, you see, we have come

-You are welcome Dis Amini, Ana Patova, Duder Bello.

Zàoter, I am sorry I missed this night of your speaking . . . Levric Pelín, the cartographer as it were. And . . .

-Bezul, please know Omer Ersan and Sirin Cucek

-Cucek! Who has brought us the Poet of Architecture?

-The self-same

-Menje

-Menje

-Al cabate

-Al Kabar

-Weile Weilín

-Weilín dje Mator

-Ah, Bezérul, you've deepened your stretch

-Dis 'A, it has been a great night

-Bezérul Lefits
 -Ana Patova
 -We were just saying how our city holds us in a suspense prolonged by bridges
 -Yet, what preoccupies me is how we have worried our economy into absentia
 -To which the waters went, Levric. Can I recommend our latest Bordeaux
 -Luswage
 -A perfect beginning
 -Most night
 -No, stay with us
 -I will not abscond with your precious Luswage
 -Ana Patova, Duder Bello
 -Beneath the turbid text
 -"The become street, the below"
 -It's the Poet
 -You must be full
 -Of this language, these poems, yes. But less so now that they are disseminated
 -And what are you now that you have finished?

-That you are back here where we have been waiting?
 -Thank you
 -Yes, who are you?
 -Ana Patova, you seem especially curious
 -Yes, Sirin, most
 -I finished the book, I went to London. The translator of Hans Faverey was there
 -"Were he still here"
 -Yes, Zàoter. It was difficult to leave that city. I had formed a relationship with the Thames—that water there. I had been in America, but when I arrived in London, all that I had previously understood in my translations dissolved in this new English
 -The wine has come
 -Thank you Bezérul Lefits
 -Is something wrong? Turn here Luswage Amini. Is something—
 -No, Bezul. It is just that we have heard a tremendous story of loss
 -I am sorry to hear. May we fill you with bread and cheese?

- I believe so. Zàoter, sün cheese from the Wafsahs?
- That would be delicious
- To move about and function in itself
- What?
- The behind-poems . . . substance
- Slow down Omer
- I am on pace with you Pelín
- In drink but not mouth
- I could not leave London until I found meaning again
- Sirin Cucek
- Bezérul Lefits
- The Bleetsgat
- Most center
- But I want to hear from Sirindeska
- Our place
- But the Poet of Architecture
- Patrons between languages
- The Bleetsgat?
- Those in it
- Us now?

- What we are doing now. I have been thinking about it. Were that poet Ravickian and not just translated as such. The Bleetsgat . . . well how can we tell that it is in the poem and not just in our reading of it? And I can't stop wondering where I place the original while I am fixated on the text
- The district
- Now transformed
- These reflective surfaces
- But, it would mean so much for the Poet to know us
- Zàoter, Omer . . . as poets?
- Ana Patova, as architect?
- You first, Z.
- Omer?
- The poem is the door fallen apart
- Yes, broken open
- So the translation, I began to feel, was a destructive reassembling—pinning back the plank flung again
- Then you came back?
- After Luswage Amini's letter

-I wrote her about form
-Of empty buildings
-Graves of Ravicka
-So it seemed that there was something for me here
and I came back. What I am as a result—
-Is left to us
-Ana Patova
-Bridge

Six

-Astonishing this is still it
-You speak quietly but I have heard
-I am making a note to myself
-Will you publicize it
-Sirin Cucek
-What is so amazing?
-That it is still today
-Has it been overlong?
-I would not have believed it possible. Very much
happened to me. It feels strange to ask, but if no one
knows you how can you separate days?
-And Amini, you feel you have not been known?
-Not entirely this year
 “My ashen rooms”
-Who said that?

-Levric, when he was younger
-Did he mean his lungs?
-I think it was for Loda, his first wife
-The head cartographer?
-Of so many years ago
-And you say these words now?
-The building I am always seeing through this window
-What would have happened were I not with you all
this night?
-Most things
-Ana Patova, you have an ear this way?
-It is difficult to pretend women are not speaking
-"And do we eat with our hands"
-I have not heard that saying in years
-Stays with me
-But it is too dark to see it now
-A bridge of things
-What do you want to see?
-It is nothing, Bezérul Lefits
-I could make it happen

-Some things do not happen anymore
-Dis 'A, that is true
-Luswage Amini, about this day of yours that is over-
long
-It is because she knows how to occupy the out-of-
doors
-What was your day, Ana Patova?
-I passed this one between scales and beaming
-Building things?
-Which is not to say. And you Sirindeska?
-In cit Ramtala. I was alone
-The silence there
-It surprises me. At its elevation. How did it reach us?
-You go down into the center and bring it back
-Or, some say, Ramtala began all of this
-Ana Patova, this has been my thought today!
-We have shared it
-But why would Ramtala
-Because it is so lovely
-Because Vlati built it

-Vlati?
 -You've awakened Z.
 -No, Ana Patova, I have not been sleeping
 -The sün cheese speaks to him
 -All this night I have had intense horizontal energy
 -And this table is on the verge of dissolve
 -And we are
 -And this is
 -Where did you get that, Duder Bello?
 -Do you remember, Luswage Amini?
 -Did you see me today at the Pouissart?
 -I did not
 -I have seen many of those . . . must stop before I
 repeat myself
 -In saying what?
 -There is a pile of them somewhere. In saying, I have
 been forlorn, since you are forcing
 -I am only attending to the flow
 -Bridge, Levric
 -"Above which and around" . . . the Poet of Architecture

-But fails to say "*dahar*"
 -Which would perfect the image
 -Sirin Cucek?
 -Luswage Amini
 -Does the poet of architecture know *dahar*?
 -It is difficult to move beyond yellow
 -I found this record but it will not play in my system
 -I thought I had seen someone
 -It was not I
 -Amini, it is most likely you were alone
 -How is it that you have this thing?
 -Ravickians
 -Even among friends
 -Cousins, it's only an interview
 -What is the emergency?
 -I do not mind explaining: there is an extraordinary
 site in front of the Pouissart building, an embankment
 but made of documentaries
 -Not stones?
 -Very little debris

-Many banks
-“Above which and around”
-Were names of foreigners
-You have witnesses?
-Only you, Duder Bello
-You are mistaken; I was not there
-We should drink more
-I am trying to break through but it is difficult
-Where are you going?
-Further in
-Here, now, Omer?
-Into the table-dissolve, I think
-Perhaps some port then?
-Or to sleep
-As if the night is over
-But this day has gone on so long, how would it be possible?
-Bezérul, an elixir for us all. We want to sleep
-You and Ravicka and Vlati
-Vlati?
-Zàoter, welcome, we thought you were drawing up

SEVEN

-Ana Patova, you shocked me by meeting someone
-Fifteen years ago
-Then you stopped coming to the bridge
-It was moved
-And that person took your life
-It was Mohaly that ravaged me
-Never. I met someone today, but I could not keep her
-Her name?
-That neither
-How can you be sure, then?
-Sure of what?
-That anyone was there
-This time I was fortunate. She touched me
-Unlike us, you're thinking
-We did not touch and your disappearance undid our meeting

-I was thinking
-Of Architecture, I know. But as a result I lost everything
-Luswage Amini, you are the great Ravickian novelist.
Is that not enough?
-I am not complaining, Ana Patova. I want to say
something, yet all I have are your words
-From so many years ago?
-"It is impossible on this bridge alone"
-The "most," I think it was
-We have been at this thirty years
-The Ravickian night is long, Ana Patova, it will not
end
-
-That day the water looked like skin
-How Luswage? Don't change it
-I am not
-Then how?
-In that distance, the rippling made layers and textured the surface somehow, a leather effect
-But why didn't you ever say this?

-I am saying it now
-After so long?
-It was only yesterday
-You are as much out of time as ever
-Matlatli Doc, and now I am fifty-five

EIGHT

- Are you surprised?
- It would be hyperbolic to say so. Something always pulls at them
- If this goes on, I'm afraid, they'll leave
- And that would be horrible?
- The city will go on as yesterday and I am hoping for a new event
- To break the whole thing open
- To elevate the crossways
- I had a dream last night
- I did as well Levric Pelín
- In which I was trudging through the city, near crepuscular. My arms ached as if I were carrying a load of bricks or stones, but when I looked down I saw that it was myself made of those things. My arms were brick;

- my legs were stone, except I remember in the dream thinking, "my bricks are arms, my stones, legs"
- Turning over city
- Inverting the quality, I suspect
- And what do you know of the new building contracts? I heard around Ciut Centali of your involvement
- From whom, Tomás? -
- You know, the dispersing grounds of coffee. "My cup to your cup," as they say. I am sure everyone here knows. You have always been "the between"
- The city no longer builds
- Even I can say that is false
- Where have you seen construction?
- You are building on top of us, this dust we are forever swiping; the brick and stone of your dreams are evident enough. Otherwise, a cartographer would only know paper
- I've only measured the plans. There are no other openings
- They want to destroy the bridges

-Zàoter, who wants to? There are only sufferers in
 Ravicka. We are not Bashir
 -But don't you think Bashir is behind all of this?
 -That piece of shit island could never wield so much
 -Tomás Bello, control yourself. You know we have a
 Basharac among us
 -Who?
 -Do not ask me to pronounce that
 -Levric, it is only a rumor, backlash due to her analysis
 of Vügerga, Vlati's sculptures. Anyway, a Basharac
 could not bear so much Ravic. Remember Tla Fogg,
 who would scratch himself when conversations went
 on too long. That same spot on his Basharac chest
 -You're right, the Ravic does seem natural coming
 from her
 -Are you staring at her mouth?
 -Only in search of ethnicity
 -Levric, *you* might be Basharac in your insistence
 -Cousins, the port is lovely. Join me
 -And then we have Omer who is foreign to all of this

-Omer who lives in the country and ignores the city,
 who only comes for wine
 -Levric's gaze is still affixed to her mouth
 -I am miming her speech to Amini . . . they are gone
 -It is we I think
 -But the city—since the despair—has become more
 like the country. Your lines are as long and despondent
 as our own
 -I am worried about Sirindeska
 -Where is she?
 -She left a while ago for the phone
 -You have nearly matched us in population. And do
 not worry about Sirin Cucek—she is the only one of
 us capable of prospering, in all sediments, though I
 know first hand she prefers the grasses of the country
 to the cracked asphalts
 -It used to be Omer who “scaled every building.” How
 so much has changed
 -Time pushes us on and out of everything
 -Cousins, I was just speaking with my friend Mircsak;

she says there's fire outside Lebash

-But nothing's there any longer

-This man is senseless with drink. Omer take comfort
in your fantasy world, but don't go so far as to erase
us. Lebash was thriving today

-Is it true that her mouth would move so desperately?

-Especially when you are staring at it

-Perhaps tonight's the night with them

-Well that in itself would be enough to blow apart the
city

-Yes, but Levric is a little less certain that he wants it

-Have they never consoled this strain between them?

-From what we've heard, not in thirty years

-We have become the mouths we usually detest

-I think it will always be Zàoter who rescues us

-The mouth stops. The head swings our way

NINE

-Dis Amini, if you will excuse my being so forward,
the journalist in me is dying to get out

-As we all are

-Is Ana Patova returning?

-She said as much

-I know I am a guest here

-Even so, we discuss your work with enthusiasm

-My thanks to the Poet of Architecture

-But you are trying to say

-That I want to be here more

-You and Ana Patova, except her ambivalence

-The place she has gone?

-Away with her thoughts

-We miss her already

-*Astanga lô*

-We have met a few times, and on each of those occasions I have asked you the same question. Oddly tonight, having drunk so freely, I feel embarrassed. Embarrassed on the very night my belt is loosened. Hard to account

-Sirindeska, despite the hours we have spent in the company of these friends, tonight, I do not believe, is one for speech

-Dis Amini, what would you have us do?

-I am happy with the attempts we have made. Yet, since you ask me, I would rather that we were waiting

-Oh Dis 'A, you've done me the favor of saying the word. Waiting. This is what has been on my mind to ask you. I will tell you it astounds me how often you have written on this topic

-Why is it so when at this second you are waiting for me and, more discreetly, I am waiting for you

-You . . . me, Dis 'A?

-You mentioned a fire at Lebash

-I had not realized you heard

-I am always concerned for my city

-Yet, if you will allow me, you walk hesitantly toward it

-You would like me to be a guerrilla, Sirin Cucek?

-Of sorts, Luswage Amini. If anyone can preserve these walls it is you

-But who is our enemy?

-That which is on the other side of our walls

-Is not that us?

-We are pushing against a counter force

-At least, that is what we believe we are doing. Can we trace this story to its beginning? To the moment of inheritance?

-People say it was Vlati

-Soft now or you will disturb our dear Zàoter. Of course, it is Vlati. But in terms of the material, in terms of "search and destroy," as the Basharac say, what is there for us to put our hands on?

-Well *someone* did something wrong

-Yes, a long, long time ago

-And everyone is innocent now?

—Everyone is leaking structure, I believe, Sirindeska. But I am of the old guard; I have been resolute for years. Despite this, I do want to know how young people regard our crisis. I study your faces. For example, a woman I met on the train today. I wanted her to tell me everything—I knew it was in her. The look she showed as we emerged from the tunnel, that she cast out over Ravicka, was wholly contemporary. You will laugh, but I found myself pushing my cheeks out so, furrowing my brow, trying to emulate her. Of course, it is impossible to mime what you don't understand. The words your generation utters when it sees the Mohaly-Sahaly bridge are words I do not know, or words I do know but would never use for that context. My face caved in with her—the woman on the train—and we had failure. But I do not think we must always have failure, which is why I am talking to you.

And also Sirin Cucek you have transformed us with your translations. You have given us the first sketches

of a new bridge, a transcendental shape, a way to re-conceive motion. You will tell me it is the Poet of Architecture who has done this. Yes, in part. But it is not just the words of “the exactitude and the ocean beside it”; it is also the figuring of that line through a language that has not relations to the exact, that has barely known water, it is the combination of these forces that has “the neighbor pouring over my mouth.”

Your mouth, Sirindeska, looks right now as if it has been open for years, as if all it knows is open. I want to write *that*

TEN

- Who is your mother, Sirin Cucek?
- It is difficult to speak of that tonight
- Ana Patova, while you were away we talked about structure
- How is she called?
- By the name Eva Kristof Zeyneptosun Sona; she is a pianist
- Sona? What a strange combination of sound. What is her nation?
- She refuses to speak
- Who is your sister, Sirin Cucek?
- She has been lost to me. We called her Vera
- And your father?
- There is not enough breath for the length of his name. What I can say is this: Cucek

- Luswage Amini
- Ana Patova
- She says "Cucek" as if we're strangers, as if all this night nothing has moved between us
- Yet, Ana Patova, in being a little less drunk, I heard a tonal difference. If Sirin will do us the favor of repeating the word, you might hear that this new pronunciation is more guttural. I'm trying to remember what Schlessler said about that. Should we bring the men into the conversation?
- Look Amini, she shakes her head
- Bezérul Lefits
- Bezul, I was sure you had abandoned us
- I am sorry, Dis Amini. The reports from Lebash are beyond perplexing. I've been trying to piece it all together. From what I've gathered . . . it's as if we are under attack. But the reports say no one is around
- Who is reporting then?
- I suppose they mean there is no one besides themselves
- Something is not right here

-There is always something not right in Ravicka
 -But wait, is there black smoke coming from the area?
 Heat, the vicious kind, the destructive force of fire?
 Are structures becoming ash?
 -I believe so, Ana Patova
 -Then what is it that will not cohere?
 -That all the structures are not ash
 -And why would all need to be? Why would a fire
 spread that fast?
 -Because it is an attack from above
 -One district of Ravicka is under assault while the
 others go on sleeping?
 -It is the technology district
 -Of course, Duder Bello. But no one occupies it at
 night. Our enemy wants our lives as well as our build-
 ings
 -We are not under attack
 -Bezérul Lefts, you have just said we are
 -I was layering the reports
 -So what is happening in Lebash centail?
 -Perhaps a building toppled

-And why would it have done that?
 -Because it was old?
 -What does Vlati say?
 -That volunteers must go and surround his likenesses
 -Who cares about those sculptures?
 -Zàoter, this is a state of emergency
 -This would not be the first one. Levric Pelín, are
 these your people trying to distract us?
 -Zàoter Limici!
 -Look at his face. It's beet-red
 -He is drunk Z.
 -What an outrage
 -The only answer is for us to go there to see
 -Before coffee?
 -Bezérul, espresso all around
 -Ah, a moment of sanity
 -Luswage Amini
 -Sirin Cucek
 -My father Joachim Hamet Oflasson Fänsh Cucek im-
 migrated to Germany the day after I finished my first
 level *pareis*. He was not a complete person, they tell

me. He could not perform with people. The day before he left, I remember that I was trying to gesture *ülyöm*, but he would only stand there. I thought my posture was uncommunicative. I asked my mother for corrections; she had none to give. Exhausted, I went to sleep, full of silence, and when I awoke the next morning he was gone.

Mama became a pianist

ELEVEN

- Can you get up?
- We're going now
- He cannot lift his head
- Amini, Zàoter is in r.e.m. sleep
- We must go as a group
- Who drank his coffee?
- It wasn't me. Why are you turned this way?
- The clock behind you, Tomás Bello
- Do you think he is dreaming of his poems again?
- That or V-l-a-t-i
- Pronounce it, so he wakes up
- Poets must not be awakened recklessly
- Who should?
- Builders
- You are very much against the city, Omer

-I can stand up quickly
 -I will stand up
 -But for the broken steps
 -Your drunkenness would be beautiful
 -Bezérul Lefits, will you join us?
 -Somebody grab Ana Patova
 -The coffees were spiked!
 -They were not
 -Please honor Bezérul. He will be our guide this late
 night. He is the only one among us with balance
 -And you Luswage Amini
 -But soon I will be crying over my streets
 -Look at you making the present impossible
 -Now, we will stand up. Sirin Cucek?
 -Dis Amini
 -Up
 -It is possible that fire is only written
 -Welcome back, Zàoter
 -I sense the verge of a great outburst
 -We are going out, Z.

-The report now is that it is impossible to enter the
 area
 -From whose perspective?
 -The problem is that this event is catastrophic, it will
 reach everyone
 -We are all blocked?
 -It seems to say
 -But how can they know we will all experience it?
 -You are stalling, Levric Pelín
 -They cannot. That is why we must go
 -Get up, Sirin Cucek
 -Levric, hold me up
 -When I clap my hands—everybody all at once
 -Zàoter Limici, stand up
 -What?
 -You are not asleep, Z. I see you scribbling away in
 your lap
 -He composes as we speak, Dis Amini?
 -Bezérul, look at his feet
 -He has dropped his writing pad onto his shoes!

-All this time
-And I thought Cucek was the spy. Um . . . not the spy
. . . we are all friends here. The . . . recorder, perhaps
-Be quiet, Levric Pelín, and stand up
-We are standing up
-Oh, you're right. Finally
-What now?
-Let's move toward the door
-Bezérul Lefits, you will leave these patrons to themselves?
-No, my son Köchl has command
-A son?
-I have never been alone
-Well then
-We leave as a group, are we to remain this way?
-Only if the scene coheres
-Otherwise?
-Till the next time . . .
-And me?
-Sirin Cucek, you have laid much ground tonight

-I will return?
-Rather, we will remain
-I can smell the fires burning
-Through the iron clad door?
-I can smell that soon I will smell them

TWELVE

- This bridge
- It is not possible that we are here again
- In thirty years we have stood at this mouth
- Or the other mouth
- So many times that it's pointless to announce it
- We say goodbye again. I have overgrown this exchange
- Yet you are the reason we must repeat it
- I?
- If you could enter the city with me
- To inhabit together?
- We have thirty years of this
- But you are city, already built
- No, awaiting structure
- The person I met did not know me
- To suggest otherwise is
- Most

- After all this we are still alone
- They say even of Ravicka
- Still, we fill this night with reported sirens
- I wonder who will hear them
- Zàoter will be first
- If he does not give in to sleep, some shadowed steps
- He will not go there before the sun is up
- Where will he go, then?
- We are all walking this line and may or may not integrate
- As with the traffic confusion of three years ago; you were stuck in the middle of it. I could only half-see; Tomás Bello said he could only a quarter move. What happens after full exposure? Have you become more a person?
- Not yet, Ana Patova. And you . . . are you whole?
- No. I have completed only present tense
- The sky is grayer in that direction
- I do not see it
- So, the event begins
- For some of us

-Sirin Cucek's mother is a pianist. Did you hear that?
-Clearly
-Imagine it
-I have been trying
-And the black streak there . . . do you see it
-That I have seen; it has been there since early night.
Before Sofia even, when we were still Vonzy
-Bridge
-The self-same
-Most . . . passageway
-That is, if you want the other side
-And the mist is new
-Mist?
-Let's cross now
-Aren't we waiting? Sometimes one just wants to hold
here
-Never to move, never to see
-I am working, Luswage Amini
-As am I
-City matter?
-Night's

-You are back to the busses
-But someone else's route
-They are right then . . . you have found a lover
-No, I have waited
-We have to cross it
-This is true. Again we will part
-The bifurcated bridge_
-We will remain
-And regroup on the other side
-Where the books meet
-And leaning structures
-I'm smelling something
-Moving outward then
-I see them now, I see the fires
-There, behind the Corp tower, the fires. Can you see
them?

DOROTHY, A PUBLISHING PROJECT

1. Renee Gladman *Event Factory*
2. Barbara Comyns *Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead*
3. Renee Gladman *The Ravickians*
4. Manuela Draeger *In the Time of the Blue Ball*

The second volume of Gladman's Ravicka trilogy continues the author's profound meditation upon translation and the ephemeral.

The Ravickians narrates the day-long odyssey of Luswage Amini, the Great Ravickian Novelist, who journeys through the city to attend the reading of an old friend. Where the earlier volume, *Event Factory*, explores Ravicka from the outside, via a visitor's attempt to understand and interpret that city's irreducible strangeness, *The Ravickians* faces the problem of translation from the perspective of an insider who struggles, throughout her account, to make plain the political and personal crises of Ravickian life that she knows to be untranslatable.

PRAISE FOR *EVENT FACTORY*: Renee Gladman has always struck me as being a dreamer—she writes that way and the dreaming seems to construct the architecture of the world unfolding before our reading eyes. —EILEEN MYLES

Renee Gladman is the author of five works of prose and one collection of poetry. Since 2005, she has operated the independent press Leon Works. She teaches in the Literary Arts Department at Brown University.

